

Frequently asked questions (FAQ) for new and prospective members.

How do I become a Town Meeting Member?

Arlington has 21 precincts (or voting districts) with 12 representatives from each, a total of 252 Town Meeting Members (TMM). To run for Town Meeting you must be a registered voter and collect signatures from 10 registered voters in your precinct to get on the ballot. You must be a resident of the precinct you represent at the time of filing nomination papers. If you move elsewhere in town after an election, you continue to represent your former precinct until the next election and then would need to run again in your new precinct. There is no limit on the number of terms someone can serve.

First, determine what precinct you are in. You can look up your precinct, polling place and maps of the precincts from the [Elections & Voting](#) pages.

Each year four people are elected in each precinct for three-year terms. If someone resigns it can create a one- or two-year vacancy. A list of current TMMs and when their terms end is available on the [Town Meeting webpage](#). Vacancies are also generally posted at the beginning of the year on the [Town's Election webpage](#). The Election webpage will have an Election Calendar with a list of all the deadlines.

Next, go to the Town Clerk's office well before the deadline to obtain nomination papers. The petition must be signed by 10 eligible voters from your precinct, so it is advisable to collect about 16 signatures in case some are disallowed. Signed petitions must be submitted to the Registrars of Voters in the Town Clerk's office by the deadline. It is possible to withdraw your name from the ballot later.

What is the time commitment for Town Meeting members?

Town Meeting runs Monday and Wednesday nights from 8 to 11, starting the fourth Monday in April. In recent years, Town Meeting has lasted about a month or 6 – 8 nights. It is not possible right now to attend remotely, but that idea is being explored to provide flexibility.

Throughout the year your time commitment will vary. It is common for TMMs to work together to hold meetings for their precinct so residents can ask questions or share their thoughts and opinions with their representatives. Town staff can provide support with scheduling these meetings on Zoom and sending Town Notice emails about the meetings.

Leading up to Town Meeting, you will need to prepare by reading all materials provided in your packet, attending hearings on the warrant articles, and reviewing Town by-laws.

How are Town Meeting Members elected?

The town-wide election takes place in early April. Everyone interested in running for Town Meeting for a particular precinct is listed in random order on the ballot. The four people with the most votes are elected for three-year terms. If there are vacancies, they are filled in order of the number of votes. If there are not enough people on the ballot or there is a tie that impacts the length of the term, the other TMMs from that precinct

Leading up to the vote prospective TMMs should consider the following activities:

Campaign Statement

When you collect your nomination papers you will be given a form and information about how to submit a brief candidate statement. All the statements submitted by the deadline are compiled and published on the [Elections & Voting page](#) to give voters a sense of who is running for Town Meeting.

Write In Candidate

You may also decide to run as a write-in candidate if you are not on the ballot. This is most likely to be successful if there are open positions on the ballot. Ask people to write your name and address on the ballot space indicated for write-in votes. It is helpful to give voters a card or slip of paper with the correct spelling of your name and your address, so they correctly write your name on the ballot. Notify the Town Clerk before election day to facilitate the counting of write-in names.

Door to Door Canvassing

Walking the precinct is one of the most effective ways to get elected. The Town Clerk's Office can provide an Excel file listing all the registered voters so you can sort by precinct if you plan to do door-to-door canvassing. You can create a handout to advertise yourself to leave at people's doors. Include your name, address, length of residence in Arlington, public positions held, community activities and any messages you wish to convey. Knock on doors, leave your handout. Do not leave your handout in the mailbox. This is illegal. Place it securely between doors, under the doormat, or in another obvious place.

Candidates Night

Is traditionally scheduled on a Thursday evening in March at Town Hall and run by the LWV of Arlington and Envision Arlington. Before the Townwide Candidate answer questions submitted by the public, there is an opportunity for Town Meeting candidates to talk with any interested resident. You should be familiar with the warrant and be aware of the major issues facing the Town, especially if it directly affects your precinct. It is acceptable to say that you have not made up your mind on a particular issue. A name tag can help voters learn your name.

Connecting with Neighbors

If you have a neighborhood organization you can contact them and ask if they have a candidates night. You can organize a coffee party in your friends and supports' homes in your precinct. You might attend parties given for town-wide candidates and ask if you can introduce yourself as a Town Meeting candidate.

Canvass on Election Day

You can stand at your polling place with a sign, or handouts, on election day. You must be 150 feet from the nearest entrance. You may not leave your sign unattended. Dress warmly and don't forget gloves!

What happens after the election?

The newly elected or reelected members are notified by the Town Clerk's office of their election to serve, the date of the beginning of Town Meeting, and the names/contact information of their fellow TMMs.

What can I do to prepare for the upcoming Town Meeting?

A: Here are several things to do to prepare for Town Meeting.

- Attend an 'Introduction to Town Meeting' session.
- Read the material that is provided in your packet. It usually contains a copy of the reports from the major boards and committees reporting to Town Meeting, a letter from the Moderator with some basic procedure and handouts.
- Sign up to the Town Meeting Members [email distribution list](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page and submit your email address to get started).
- Hold a precinct meeting with the other TMMs to hear about the interests and concerns of your precinct.
- The Select Board, Redevelopment Board, and Finance Committee all hold hearings on the warrant articles often starting as early as late February. You can watch the hearings or read memos about the articles that may garner the most interest or controversy.

What do I need to know about my first Town Meeting?

Q: What should I do upon arrival at Town Hall?

A: On each night of Town Meeting, arrive a little early, sign in at the Town Clerk's table *in the back of the hall and collect your voting device* then pick up any printed material from the tables at the back of the hall or that is left on the chairs. Read all these additional materials.

Q: How does the electronic voting work?

A: Each TMM is assigned a device with their name on it. You can only vote for yourself – Arlington does not allow proxy voting. The Moderator will announce that we are voting and a green light on the stage is visible. We generally have 20 seconds to vote 1 for Yes, 2 for No, or 3 to Abstain. After voting has closed, we may display the names of each member so you can verify your vote was recorded properly, however we often only do that for close votes. You can press any button on the handset when debate is open and request to get on the speaker list.

Q: Who has the right to speak?

A: TMMs have the right to speak once recognized by the Town Moderator. To get recognized, add your name to the list (or if the system is down, raise your hand and the Moderator will note that you wish to speak.) Residents of Arlington may also speak once introduced by a TMM. Non-residents may also speak, but only with the approval of the assembled TMMs.

Q: What exactly is voted on?

A: Town Meeting considers and votes upon the recommended vote of the respective committee or board that heard the Article. The recommended vote on an article can be amended or substituted. If no committee submits a recommended vote, then the Articles proponent must make a motion for a

substitute vote. A substitute motion or motion to amend must be submitted to the Town Moderator two days prior to the session in which the article is debated. Information about deadlines, forms, and procedures for submitting motions can be found on the [Town Meeting Members Email List](#) page.

Q: How do we know what we are voting on?

A: The Town Moderator ensures that the wording and the order of the vote is clear to the assembled TMMs.

Q: If TMMs don't agree with the Town Moderator, what are they allowed to do?

A: If TMMs doubt the Moderator's ruling, five or more TMMs can stand and challenge the ruling. This prompts a standing vote.

Q: Why might the order in which the Articles are deliberated change, especially if some are put off until late in the session?

A: Most often this happens if information supporting the article or the presenter is delayed. As a response to this situation, a motion to table the article or postpone to a time certain is then put before the meeting for a vote.

Q: What Rules of Order does Town Meeting use?

A: Town Meetings operate in accordance with rules of procedure established by general laws, our bylaws, [Title I- General Government, Article 1: Town Meetings](#), and local customs and traditions as well as a standard parliamentary handbook, *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law, 3rd ed.* Use of *Town Meeting Time* provides TMMs a complete framework that all can readily learn and understand.

Additional online sources:

[Town Meeting Section](#): Provides information leading up to Town Meeting including Warrant Article submission packet to final warrant, Reports to Town Meeting, the Town Manager's Financial Plan, Town Meeting Members and link to subscribe to Town Meeting Member email list.

[Town Laws & Regulations](#): A handy list to Arlington Laws and Regulations including Town and Zoning Bylaws, Traffic Rules and Orders, Town Manager's Act, School Committee Policies, and more including, the bylaws that relate to Town Meeting: [Title I- General Government, Article 1: Town Meetings](#).

[Town Election Section](#): Provides information leading up to Annual Town elections including election calendar, candidates, polling locations, and results. Also provides state and federal election information and results.

To purchase a copy of *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law, 3rd ed.* [Visit the massmoderators.org.](#)
[View an excerpt.](#)